

Breaking through on identity-based bullying and aggression.

MAKING SCHOOLS INCLUSIVE AND PROTECTIVE AGAINST HARMFUL AGGRESSION



41%

of Minnesota high school students have been bullied or harassed in the past month about their identity or stigmatized personal characteristics.

Every young person has great potential. Each day, school staff contribute to making a place where students can learn, explore, and see what is possible for themselves and their futures. Schools are formative environments, responsible for sparking curiosity and confidence in young people.

However, the reality is that **Minnesota students are reporting being bullied at school in high numbers.** You can take action to ensure school is a safe place for students to show up and learn.

Bullying is an evolving challenge. And it may not look the same as it once did.

Aggression based on characteristics like gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and body size is **deeply harmful** for students, even if it presents differently than bullying as it is traditionally understood.

Aggression that focuses on a student's identity attacks the core of who they are, the unique background and experiences that shape them as they move through the world, now and as an adult. These aggressions are **cumulative and constant reminders of persecution and injustices** that have been historically experienced by people who share their gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and body size.

Microaggressions are a common attack related to identity. These subtle insults or actions add up, and tell a student they don't belong.

3.5x

Students of color are bullied or harassed about race, ethnicity, or country of origin 3.5 times more than white students.

8x

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, or questioning students are bullied or harassed about their sexual orientation 8 times more than straight students.

6.5x

Transgender and gender diverse students are bullied or harassed about their gender 6.5 times more than cisgender students.

2x

Overweight or obese students are bullied or harassed about their weight or size 2 times more than students at a healthy weight or underweight.

“People want to say you're being racist when you call someone the n-word or something, but there are so many more subtle ways to be racist, and more hurtful, even, than just straight-up saying something racist.”

- STUDENT, AGE 15

“I didn't think it was that big a problem up until I felt like I needed to leave that school, which I did. But it was definitely affecting a lot of my life. It was affecting my grades, it was affecting how I played sports, it was affecting my family.”

- STUDENT, AGE 14

HARMFUL HEALTH EFFECTS

Students who experience identity-based aggression have a variety of adverse physical, emotional, and behavioral health outcomes. Research has shown that this type of hostility is linked with general health symptoms like headaches and stomach aches substance use problems, and poorer mental health. These experiences also affect school engagement and performance.

Early intervention can mean better outcomes for all students involved. There is a continuum of responses to fit the situation and students involved, creating immediate safety, and the opportunity for deeper empathy and learning.

HOW TO ACT IN SUPPORT

Cultivate trusted student-adult relationships at school. This is especially important for students who have identities that are historically persecuted or face injustice. Listen to them, believe them, act for their safety.

Advocate for more advanced staff training on this topic. There are experts and resources that you can access to learn more about breaking out of a bystander role, what to do when you witness identity-based aggression, using culturally responsive strategies, and creating a trauma-informed school, available through Education MN or the Minnesota Department of Education.

Make sure students know about the process to report aggressions, whether it's them or other students experiencing it.

When a student is distressed, particularly due to identity-based aggression, practice psychological first aid. Know your school's protocol, when support staff are available, and when it is appropriate to call 911.

Follow up with students to show support for those who have been targeted, and to support the continued growth of those who act as aggressors.



ABOUT THE RESEARCH

This research uses data from the Minnesota Student Survey, the School Health Profiles Survey, focus groups with diverse youth boards, and interviews with students, parents, and school personnel. To learn more about identity-based aggression, including our methods, findings, resources and recommendations, please visit HealthEASY.umn.edu

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